

CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Summary of Proceedings and Suggestions for a Program

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CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF ANTI-SEMITISM

I. BACKGROUND OF THE CONFERENCE

THE American Jewish Committee has for some time been interested in establishing a scientific basis for its defense program. In 1943-44 the American Jewish Committee subsidized a series of studies in anti-Semitism conducted under the direction of Dr. Max Horkheimer of the Institute of Social Research, Columbia University. The desire to evaluate the findings of studies and the urgent need of validating the premises of a sound defense program led the Committee to seek the advice and guidance of outstanding social scientists. In view of recent anti-Semitic manifestations in several communities, it was also felt that defense agencies could ill afford to continue programs whose appeal is not continuously checked with the aid of psychologists and sociologists.

The American Jewish Committee sponsored the Conference on Research in the Field of Anti-Semitism which was held May 20-21, 1944 in New York City. The group of twenty-five participants included psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists and economists. The actual planning and convocation of the Conference was the work of a special committee consisting of Professor Gordon W. Allport of Harvard University, Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman of Boston and Dr. Mark A. May, Director of the Institute of Human Relations, Yale University. Dr. Philip Klein of the New York School of Social Work served as Secretary of the Conference.

The American Jewish Committee was represented at the Conference by Mr. Ira Younker, member of the Executive Committee, and Dr. John Slawson, Mr. Richard Rothschild and Dr. Julius B. Maller of the staff of the American Jewish Committee.

Although there was some difference of opinion with regard to the nature and causes of anti-Semitism, there was considerable agreement concerning the basic principles of a defense policy and the need of research for the implementation of a defense program. The consensus was that defense activities must be continually tested, that an effective program of combating anti-Semitism must be intensive and unequivocal, that the program should not be limited to a rational approach and that strong emphasis be placed upon latent anti-

Semitism and upon the intrinsic relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-democratic attitudes.

The digest that follows summarizes the proceedings of the Conference, the consensus expressed and the implications for policy. It is based in part on a report by Dr. Philip Klein and on a transcript of the discussions. Because of the nature of the informal discussion at the Conference, this Summary is not to be taken as an exact presentation of views formulated by any participant or by the group as a whole, but rather as generalizations based upon those views, with particular emphasis upon areas of agreement. Some of the opinions have been simplified—perhaps oversimplified—in the present Summary for the purpose of non-technical presentation. The Summary has been edited by Dr. Julius B. Maller, Director of the Library of Jewish Information, American Jewish Committee.

Conference Purpose

Although the purpose of the Conference was clear and definitive, no specific program was prepared in advance. Instead, it was felt that from a spontaneous discussion by outstanding specialists in the various fields of social science there would emerge some fundamental principles and general agreement regarding basic policy and long-range planning. By this approach, it was hoped to obviate the usual preconceived theories and differences between the disciplines, and to encourage a genuine exchange of ideas and experience uninhibited by programmatic restraints.

II. VIEWS ON NATURE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

THE Conference dealt at some length with various aspects of anti-Semitism as determined by tradition, economic conditions, political considerations and other factors. Primary emphasis was placed upon the social-psychological components of anti-Semitism.

Religious difference as a source of anti-Jewish feeling has been an important factor in the past. In modern times, economic rivalry has assumed primary importance among the causes of anti-Semitism. Erroneous theories of race and racism have been both cause and effect of anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice.

In discussing the psychological pattern of anti-Semitism, the conferees relied upon the clinical experience of psychiatrists, psychological studies in individual motivation and group interaction, ob-

jective experimentation in the field of anti-Semitism, and content analyses of anti-Semitic propaganda.

It was recognized that in contemporary society there exists a great deal of individual frustration, conflict and hostility, which produces a need for compensatory aggression. This need was considered fundamental, whereas the objects of aggression are conditioned by time, place, and tradition. The Jew represents a readily available object and anti-Semitism a convenient channel through which aggression may be exercised.

Aggression of the Anti-Semite

Frequently, the anti-Semite projects his own aggressive designs upon the victim and tries to persuade himself and others that the victim is or intends to be an aggressor. The anti-Semite aspires, perhaps subconsciously, to free himself from feelings of guilt or shame that accompany his actions. He thus convinces himself that anti-Semitism is necessary to restrain the Jew from carrying out his nefarious designs. Latent anti-Semitism and subconscious prejudice are thus as important, if not more so, than overt manifestations.

Poll interviewers have observed that some people become vaguely embarrassed when asked about anti-Semitism. The conferees believed that this was because the widely accepted concepts of fair play and neighborliness are opposed to anti-Semitic sentiment and provoke feelings of guilt in those interviewees who harbor feelings of prejudice. Since the mores of our society demand homage to ethical behavior, to principles of generosity, nobility and fairness, the persecution of any group results in feelings of shame. To overcome guilt feelings, the anti-Semite presents the Jew as lacking in ethical principles and unworthy of being treated in accordance with accepted moral standards. Historically, and in the light of present events, anti-Semitism is one of the central elements in anti-democratic strategy, and the consideration of a specific group as inferior is a mechanism of the aggressive personality.

Sadistic tendencies are generally directed against those least able to defend themselves. Weakness and defenselessness may provoke sadism. Pictures or stories of Nazi brutality toward Jews will not necessarily evoke feelings of sympathy and horror in that relatively small segment of the population which may be characterized as sadistic and may even stimulate among them a desire to inflict further suffering.

Psychology of Scapegoating

Unable or unwilling to solve his personal problems in a rational manner and to adjust himself to existing economic and social conditions, the bigot vents his wrath upon the Jewish victim as a convenient outlet for his thwarted emotions. The Jew becomes a scapegoat upon whom the anti-Semite pours the resentment caused by disappointments and failures in his everyday life. It has been pointed out that the scapegoat is usually a "safe-goat"; it is never a "scape-lion" that is attacked, but a victim weak and isolated from the community at large.

There was some difference of opinion concerning the universal necessity of a scapegoat. While the conferees were agreed that aggressive tendencies are ever present, it was also recognized that they need not be always directed against a scapegoat, but could be channelized towards goals that are socially constructive.

In the thinking of the anti-Semite the stereotyped concept of the Jew is of paramount importance. Stereotypes reduce people and events to a few over-simplified traits. Thus, the anti-Semite portrays the Jews as aggressive and as striving for power. The appeal of the stereotype is of such character that it digs deep into the emotions. Employed by anti-Semitic propagandists, it serves to crystallize, perpetuate and intensify anti-Jewish feelings. Stereotypes of physical and mental characteristics are important weapons in the arsenal of the anti-Semitic rabble rouser.

Some attempt was made at the Conference to analyze and describe the personality of the anti-Semite. His personality structure was depicted as typical of the reactionary, being anti-labor, anti-foreign, anti-liberal, as well as anti-Semitic. There was further speculation as to whether the anti-Semite possessed paranoid traits and it was generally agreed that this question could not be answered without additional clinical research. For the most part, the conferees avoided rigid classification of the anti-Semite and recognized that the numerous causes of anti-Semitism might produce a variety of anti-Semitic types. It was felt that research into the fundamental characteristics common to all anti-Semites should be undertaken with particular emphasis upon the role of the subconscious in anti-Semitic manifestations.

III. EXTENT OF ANTI-SEMITISM

WHILE it was generally recognized that the causes of anti-Semitism are deep-rooted and that the nature of anti-Semitism is extremely complex, there was difference of opinion as to its prevalence, universality and trend.

Much of the information presented on the extent of anti-Semitism was based upon public-opinion polls conducted in recent years throughout the United States. About one-fourth of the people interviewed expressed unmistakable anti-Semitic feelings and a similar proportion expressed definitely pro-Jewish attitudes. The views of the remainder were less certain in either direction. Those who dislike Jews cite the usual anti-Semitic allegations of too much power, malpractice in business, etc.

Among those interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with their economic status, there were twice as many who indicated resentment of Jews, as compared with those who made a satisfactory adjustment. Economic discontent is usually more prevalent among educated groups, and this might account for the slight increase in anti-Semitism as the educational level rises. There is a higher incidence of anti-Semitism in urban communities than in rural areas.

Concerning the relationship between nativity and anti-Semitism, the incidence of the latter is greater among native-born of foreign parentage than among either foreign-born interviewees or native-born of native parentage. The tendency of certain foreign-born groups to be somewhat less anti-Semitic may be due to the fact that such groups experience some ostracism themselves, and consequently are inclined to sympathize with the Jewish group.

Regional Differences

There are marked regional differences in the distribution of anti-Jewish prejudice. Anti-Semitism is stronger in the East than in other regions. Lesser anti-Semitism in the South was attributed to the fact that Jews in that region occupy a relatively high socio-economic status, are well integrated into civic life, and are therefore highly esteemed.

Among Negroes, anti-Semitism is more prevalent in the North than in the South, since Negro opinion probably reflects the prevailing attitude toward the Jew.

On the basis of data derived from polls and other sources, the conferees were of the opinion that awareness of anti-Semitism as a

social problem has increased. There was less agreement in regard to the evidence of a corresponding increase in anti-Jewish feeling. It was generally felt that the economic and social dislocation after the war is likely to bring about a heightening of group conflict and anti-Semitic agitation.

IV. REVIEW OF DEFENSE PROGRAMS

THE conferees considered Jewish defense programs now in operation as having a two-fold aim: the long-range educational project to eliminate prejudice, and the more immediate problem of fighting anti-Semitic manifestations.

In combating the political manifestations of anti-Semitism, it was recognized that militant anti-Semites are probably small in number, that the vast majority of people are not actively anti-Semitic, but that among the majority there are numerous *potential* anti-Semites. It is mainly the majority group rather than the militant minority that defense agencies aspire to influence.

Anti-Semitism is presented in defense programs as the antithesis of democracy, the enemy of the individual's class interest, his labor union, his church, his school and his country. It is made clear that in fascist strategy anti-Semitism is the spearhead of anti-democracy.

In general, defense activities are promoted through special groups, local and mass media. In the group approach, the population is divided into such categories as labor, veterans, foreign-language, youth and women's organizations, and similar divisions which make possible the utilization of appeals adjusted to specific group interests. Defense materials are devised and disseminated in accordance with group requirements. These include resolutions, speeches, editorials, "comics," and other material prepared by defense agencies.

The local approach entails intensive work in communities and may include introduction of inter-faith projects and other activities similar to those carried out on a national scale. Cooperation of local newspapers and radio stations is secured and materials are prepared specifically for such use.

The Mass Approach

The mass approach utilizes media of national communication including radio networks and press syndicates. Speeches by leading

personalities, pointing to the dangers of anti-Semitism and of anti-minority movements generally are given wide circulation. Pro-democratic material is created for possible "salting in" in soap opera plots, cartoons, comic strips, news commentaries and magazine articles.

Since anti-Semitism is the basic concern of all Americans, the pro-democratic propaganda of a defense agency should appeal to such organizations as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Boy Scouts, labor organizations, educational associations and women's clubs and should utilize mass appeals through radio, press and motion pictures.

Jews are often confronted with the problem of refuting specific accusations that they are Communists, war mongers, draft dodgers, or participants in international conspiracies. It must be remembered that very often such attacks are leveled by a small group of extremists whose voices reach only a minority of the population. To attempt a reply would in some instances entail further dissemination of the anti-Semite's libels and, in effect, ally the defense agency with Nazi strategy by unwittingly propagandizing "the Jewish question." The answer to such charges must be made available to key individuals and to molders of opinion on a national scale. However, the principal work of the propaganda agency in such cases is to expose the motives, objectives and methods of those who seek to use the divisive technique. This approach enables the defense agency to portray anti-Semitism as a threat to America rather than as a peculiarly Jewish issue; it has the additional advantage of putting the anti-Semite on the defensive.

Illustrative of what has been done in combating prejudice is the work of the Bureau of Intercultural Education as well as the Springfield Plan of intercultural education which has been incorporated into the school systems of Boston and other communities. Through the medium of the classroom, an attempt is made to teach students about contributions of Jews to society and to modify the accepted stereotype of the Jew. Another line of action, taken in Boston, is a special program for the training of police in handling group conflicts and mob violence.

Need for Personalized Contacts

The conferees suggested some modifications in the current practice of defense programs. None denied the value of mass media in reaching a great many people quickly and cheaply. However, it was recog-

nized that, as compared with the individual and the group approach, mass media lack flexibility. The factor of gratification plays a more important role with the individual and even the group than it possibly could in the mass appeal. When the individual or group member accepts the point being presented orally, he is rewarded by the hearty agreement of the speaker and others present, which serves to strengthen conviction. Therefore, mass approaches by such media as the radio and the syndicated press should be supplemented by more personalized contacts.

It was further pointed out that there were important differences between group and individual reactions to propaganda. The special purpose of the group will have a bearing on the type of appeal that will succeed with it. Therefore, not only should the method be suited to the psychology of groups in general, but it should be further modified in accordance with the specific character of the group.

Influencing group leaders was suggested as a particularly effective way of winning group approval. Leaders, or people who have authority with their own groups, are important since group members tend to accept their leaders' opinions.

Appeal through Humor

A weapon that may have a far more potent influence upon the subconscious mind than appeals to reason, justice or mercy, is humor. The conferees pointed out that one of the ways in which Hitler was discredited in this country was through ridicule. Suggestions were made that American anti-Semites be ridiculed and deflated, and that jokes bringing out the American virtues of fair play and tolerance at the expense of Jew baiters be circulated. Stereotypes lampooning the anti-Semite should be devised, tested and disseminated. Some of Walt Disney's creations were suggested as worthy of study in this connection.

Strength versus Weakness

Against the sadist, the conferees felt that even this type of approach may be of little avail. It was suggested that the way to deal with such people is to discredit them. As for the bulk of the population, the conferees agreed that the American ideal of fair play and democracy should be portrayed as the antithesis of anti-Semitism, so that guilt feelings might lessen susceptibility to anti-Semitic appeals.

The general consensus of the Conference was that a program designed to combat anti-Semitism must be based on a true knowl-

edge of the nature of anti-Semitism. In this connection, the *sub-conscious* mechanisms underlying receptivity to anti-Semitism were considered to be of utmost importance. Subconsciously, weakness is regarded with contempt and is provocative of aggression. To expel from the subconscious the image of the Jew as weak and frustrated, it was urged that by whatever vehicle the general public is reached the Jew should be represented as enjoying the strength of public support rather than the weakness of social isolation, as being like rather than unlike other groups, as surviving rather than victimized. It should be emphasized that persecution of the Jew, as discrimination against any other segment of the population, starts a chain of events which may lead to social disorganization.

Furthermore, limiting the program to attempts at evoking sympathy for the suffering Jew was deemed undesirable since such appeals may be interpreted as symptomatic of weakness and as appeasing the aggressor. On the other hand, overemphasis of the social and economic attainments of the Jews might arouse conscious antagonism and consequently should be avoided.

There was a decided feeling at the Conference that the moral and spiritual strength of the Jew should be stressed, with emphasis upon dignity and self respect. The status of the Jew should be depicted as the result of wholesome adjustment to the American environment. The Jew's transition from immigrant to citizen should be related to comparable adjustments made by other segments of the American population.

In strengthening the general attitude that anti-Semitism is in complete contradiction to the democratic way of life, disapprobation of anti-Semitism by communal leaders with influence upon group opinion was regarded as of crucial importance. It is necessary for defense agencies to discover the actual leaders of community opinion in order to utilize the powerful social controls exercised by leadership in the normal communal situation.

Some conferees suggested that reduction of the "social stimulus value" of the Jew would diminish anti-Semitism. This, they believe, could be accomplished by further integration of Jewish life within the general cultural pattern of the American community.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

A SIGNIFICANT phase of the Conference deliberations was a series of research suggestions for the evaluation of defense activities. These are not, for the most part, completely formulated plans for

research projects, but indicate expert opinion concerning the proper orientation of research activity in a defense program.

Studies in the Character of Individuals

Emphasis was placed upon the need of research aimed at better understanding of the personality pattern of the bigot in general, and of the anti-Semite in particular. Some objection was voiced to limiting research to cases of anti-Semitic extremists. Study of the character of individuals who profess no prejudice and those who engage in the promotion of inter-group amity would also be of great value. A developmental study of anti-Semitic attitudes was urged, with particular reference to an analysis of the development of anti-Jewish prejudice among children.

Research Into Group Dynamics

The conferees stressed the importance of studying the behavior of groups: adherence and allegiance and the role played by leaders in influencing group opinion. Specifically, it was felt that more should be known concerning the psychological factors involved in the functioning of an anti-Semitic group and of the "gains" the group expects to derive from its activity. Research might also be profitably pursued into the role of "respectable" front organizations which give support to anti-Semitic propaganda. A proposal was also made to analyze the work of constructive committees in the interfaith and intercultural field for the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness and accomplishment of such organizations.

Testing Anti-Semitism in Selected Communities

It was suggested that studies be made in selected urban areas of the conditions of inter-action between Jews and Christians which may lead to group conflicts; of the relationship between the nature of anti-Semitism in a particular community and the socio-economic status of the Jewish group; of the susceptibility to anti-Semitism of diverse religious, political, economic and ethnic groups and of the relationship between social mobility and anti-Semitism. It was also suggested that "before and after" types of research be carried out in communities in which defense programs are introduced, for the purpose of measuring any changes resulting from defense efforts. For example, the introduction of such educational activities as the Springfield Plan should be accompanied by an adequate testing program for the evaluation of results. Allied to this research would be

a study of reported instances where intolerant and anti-democratic communities have undergone a pro-democratic transformation with a consequent diminution of racial and religious prejudice.

Research and Defense Policy

The question as to whether defense activities should center upon combating the generic factor of fascism or the specific factor of anti-Semitism might be clarified to some degree by content analyses of subversive publications and speeches. It was further suggested that an analysis of the methods of mass appeal employed by the demagogue might yield some interesting results. Those methods of appeal are generally non-rational, employing extensively the stereotype, slogan, humor, and ridicule. In order to combat such tactics, argument and rational refutation are of limited value.

Preparation of Testing Techniques

The value of polling methods which are employed at present is limited to the measurement of general averages, regional and denominational differentials and the ascertainment of trends. Frequently, the response of the interviewee is conditioned by the attitude of the interviewer; an interviewer giving the impression of being anti-Semitic would evoke an anti-Semitic response more often than one who was pro-Semitic in his approach. Moreover, the popular taboo against frank profession of prejudice inhibits the response of many. The polling process is not sufficiently flexible to be of much use in the study of the complex pattern of prejudice and the results do not lend themselves to intensive analysis of true motives.

There is urgent need for a testing technique that would reveal the total psychological pattern of the interviewee, remove the restraint present in the normal interview situation and permit the investigator to distinguish between anti-Semitism in its conscious and in its subconscious manifestations. Measuring devices should be developed with careful regard to their psychological content and to their susceptibility to qualitative and statistical analysis.

Specific proposals for research in methodology included use of the motion picture in analysis of audience reactions to situations involving interaction between Jews and non-Jews as presented on the screen, and the application of the "life history" technique in analysis of the anti-Semitic personality.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEFENSE POLICY

THE Conference on Research in the Field of Anti-Semitism was called primarily for the purpose of determining how the findings of social science could be applied to make defense activities more effective. A number of programmatic implications emerged from the deliberations of the scientists:

1. *Testing Effectiveness of Program*

The crucial test of a defense program is the extent of its acceptability by the people toward whom it is directed and the change in attitude and behavior it brings about. Untested defense efforts may be psychologically sterile, failing to evoke a response or even yielding a completely opposite effect from that intended. There is urgent need for reliable techniques in gauging the extent and trend of anti-Semitic manifestations and their contributory factors and in testing the relative effectiveness of different methods and media of appeal. A follow-up testing program to measure the actual effects of defense efforts is also desirable.

2. *Adjusting Program to Group Differentials*

Defense activity must be formulated in accordance with the specific needs and interests of the group it seeks to influence. It must be alert to economic, regional, ethnic, religious, cultural and educational differences; it must recognize that people are most responsive to appeals made within the framework of the social groups to which they adhere, i.e., churches, labor unions, fraternal orders, etc. The medium of appeal should be adjusted to the character of the respective groups.

Defense agencies must be aware that anti-Semitism has many faces, that it varies in intensity and in manner of expression, and that there are latent as well as overt forms of anti-Semitism. There is also a fundamental difference between organized and unorganized manifestations of anti-Semitism. Groups which had been subjected to intensive anti-Semitic propaganda should be approached differently than those not exposed to such influence. The defense program must be dynamic, flexible, adjusted to basic differentials, and utilize both rational and non-rational appeals.

3. *Emphasizing Positive Character of Judaism*

Because of the subconscious motivation of anti-Semitism, it is possible that appeals to sympathy and repeated references to Jews

as weak and victimized are relatively ineffective. Rather should emphasis be placed upon the positive nature of Judaism, the spiritual strength of the Jew, and the dignity of his position legitimately obtained. On the other hand, the anti-Semite should be exposed as morally and spiritually deficient.

4. Pointing to Similarities Rather than Differences

Anti-Semitic propaganda is divisive, depicting the Jew as an alien and identifying all Jews with a fixed stereotype—"all Jews are alike." Defense programs must show that the Jew is an integral part of the multicultural pattern of American civilization; that the Jewish group, though unique in some respects and having a common heritage, is essentially like rather than unlike other components of the American population. At the same time emphasis should be placed upon the existence of differences within the Jewish group regarding economic status and political alignment.

5. Relationship Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Democracy

Natural allies in combating anti-Semitism are all groups which have a tangible interest in the preservation of democracy. Although the fight against the anti-Jewish specific in fascist propaganda should not be abandoned, the assault upon the Jew must be recognized as the spearhead of an attack upon democracy. Thus, fundamentally anti-Semitism is more than a Jewish issue—it is a threat to the best interests of Jew and non-Jew alike and therefore a basic American problem.

6. Understanding of Anti-Semitic Strategy

In combating prejudice, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the adversary's strategy in order not to play into his hands. There is urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of the contents of anti-Semitic writings. Scapegoating, divide-and-conquer, and the diversion of attention from really important issues are among the basic principles of anti-Semitic strategy; but much more complete knowledge is needed of the dynamics of anti-Semitism.

7. Preparing for the Post-War Period

Defense agencies must be prepared to cope with ascertainable post-war trends by a realistic evaluation of previous experiences in the United States and abroad. They must aid in the general struggle

against insecurity which is a root cause of aggression, and they must formulate a constructive program for the eradication of prejudice and the promotion of intercultural amity.

Mindful of the changing world situation, it was recommended that further conferences of scientists endeavor to implement research and testing programs.